



## The Star-Ledger

### Shore homeowners fear losing rights

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**BY MARYANN SPOTO**  
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With a beach replenishment project on Long Beach Island approaching, oceanfront homeowners complained yesterday that the plan might protect their houses, but it isn't protecting their property rights.

A meeting initially called on the south end of the island to address questions from Long Beach Township residents about ceding easement rights to the state quickly evolved into a gripe session attended by more than 300 homeowners from there and neighboring towns who said they have been left in the dark about the details of the \$159 million beach project.

"The people need to know more" from both the state Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said Long Beach Township Mayor Dianne Gove after the two-hour meeting at the St. Francis Center in Brant Beach. "The state needs to share more information with the people."

In October and November, more than 800 oceanfront homeowners received letters from the DEP and the Army Corps asking them to grant easements on a small part of their property near the water's edge for the replenishment work, which started on an emergency basis in Harvey Cedars last month.

But the homeowners, who complained the letters were confusing and full of "legalese," said they were reluctant to sign the easement agreements because they feared they would be signing away their rights as homeowners or assuming liability that should belong to the town, state or federal government.

Besides asking for easement rights for land parallel to the water line, the municipalities may also seek easements perpendicular to the beach for public access. That has been a sticking point with many residents in North Beach and Loveladies, where public access points are few.

Harris Vernick, who lives in the North Beach section of Long Beach Township, asked about scenarios that could land him in court if someone using the beach in front of his home was injured.

Deputy Attorney General Dean Jablonski didn't give responses specific enough to satisfy Vernick's questions.

"We need some protection there if we're supposed to go along with something like this," Vernick said.

Louise Sonnenberg of Ship Bottom said she signed the easement agreement right away in the interest of protecting the beach, but has since changed her mind because of the unanswered questions.

"I'm feeling very uneasy about the easement. How do you null and void it?" she said, evoking loud applause from the audience.

After the meeting, David Rosenblatt, administrator of the DEP's Office of Engineering and Construction, said residents have had years to digest information provided during a number of public meetings on the project. He said new residents may have been slightly less informed, and others may not have thought the project would ever get under way because it has been in the planning for more than a decade.

The project, scheduled to begin full speed next spring in Ship Bottom and Surf City, would pump about 7.4 million cubic yards of sand from the ocean floor onto some 15 miles of beaches from Loveladies to Holgate to protect the fragile barrier island, which is often hit hard by storms.

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